

“Sabbath in the Family”

Isaiah 56:1-8

Luke 6:1-11

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Lake Forest, Illinois
Father’s Day

Isaiah 56:1-8

⁵⁶Thus says the LORD:

Maintain justice, and do what is right,
for soon my salvation will come,
and my deliverance be revealed.

² Happy is the mortal who does this,
the one who holds it fast,
who keeps the sabbath, not profaning it,
and refrains from doing any evil.

³ Do not let the foreigner joined to the LORD say,
‘The LORD will surely separate me from his people’;
and do not let the barren say,
‘I am just a dry tree.’

⁴ For thus says the LORD:
To the barren who keep my sabbaths,
who choose the things that please me
and hold fast my covenant,

⁵ I will give, in my house and within my walls,
a monument and a name
better than sons and daughters;
I will give them an everlasting name
that shall not be cut off.

⁶ And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD,
to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD,
and to be his servants,
all who keep the sabbath, and do not profane it,
and hold fast my covenant—

⁷ these I will bring to my holy mountain,
and make them joyful in my house of prayer;
their burnt-offerings and their sacrifices
will be accepted on my altar;
for my house shall be called a house of prayer
for all peoples.

⁸ Thus says the Lord GOD,
who gathers the outcasts of Israel,
I will gather others to them
besides those already gathered.

Introduction to Scripture

This summer our sermon series has focused on Sabbath-keeping. Over the last few weeks we’ve explored how we might keep Sabbath on the road, how the fellowship of Sabbath comes alive around the table, and more.

Today, our first lesson from Isaiah reminds us how important Sabbath-keeping is. In fact, of all the Commandments the prophet could have cited as the most important to keep, the most valued by God, there is only one mentioned: whoever keeps Sabbath is welcome in God’s house; whoever keeps Sabbath will be blessed beyond measure. That includes the foreigners who were outside the Jewish covenant ... the barren or unclean or deformed, who were in those days presumed to be out of favor with God ... ANYONE

who keeps Sabbath is beloved and welcome and abundantly blessed.

ANYONE who keeps Sabbath is part of God's family.

It's an important reminder to those of us who were born into a Christian church. The prophet is reminding us that being a child of God isn't a matter of entitlement or inheritance, of checking the boxes of baptism and confirmation. Being a child of God requires us to seek God's heart, invites us to fulfill God's will, inspires us to want to please God. And pleasing God begins with keeping Sabbath, which in turn helps us hold fast to God's covenant, to maintain justice, and do what is right. But for now, let's turn to our second lesson, and Jesus' take on what Sabbath-keeping means.

Luke 6:1-11

⁶ One sabbath while Jesus was going through the cornfields, his disciples plucked some heads of grain, rubbed them in their hands, and ate them. ² But some of the Pharisees said, 'Why are you doing what is not lawful on the sabbath?' ³ Jesus answered, 'Have you not read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? ⁴ He entered the house of God and took and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and gave some to his companions?' ⁵ Then he said to them, 'The Son of Man is lord of the sabbath.'

⁶ On another sabbath he entered the synagogue and taught, and there was a man there whose right hand was withered. ⁷ The scribes and the Pharisees watched him to see whether he would cure on the sabbath, so that they might find an accusation against him. ⁸ Even though he knew what they were thinking, he said to the man who had the withered hand, 'Come and stand here.' He got up and stood there. ⁹ Then Jesus said to them, 'I ask you, is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the sabbath, to save life or to destroy it?' ¹⁰ After looking around at all of them, he said to him, 'Stretch out your hand.' He did so, and his hand was restored. ¹¹ But they were filled with fury and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus.

Recently I had the pleasure of visiting with Madeleine McMullan's daughter Margaret. Margaret, a professor of literature and writing at University of Evansville, is also a prolific writer - and I have deeply loved every single book she's written. Her latest book is an anthology entitled *Every Father's Daughter*, a witness to the impact our fathers have, and a testament

to her own late father, her hero, role-model and cheerleader. (If you haven't bought your Father's Day present, *Every Father's Daughter* is available at Lake Forest Bookstore!)

Today on Father's Day, I want to start by sharing Margaret's opening thoughts. She says:

“Our culture is rich with images and ideals of what makes good mothering, but our idea of what makes good fathering is more abstract. Is this because we don't expect much from a father? We know what is NOT good fathering. A good father does not drink away all the money or shoot at people. He does not scar his wife or his children for life. But what does a father do right?”ⁱ

Indeed, what is a father *supposed* to do? What do we hope for from our fathers? What do we most need from them?

When I was growing up, the assumption was that our fathers were the rulers of the roost, the Patriarchs of the palace. (My father still playfully reminds us that as long as he's alive, he's still the Patriarch, and none of his five children will dispute it!)

But not every Patriarch used that authority wisely – and when we have authority, what we do with it matters. That's the message from our Gospel lesson today. Jesus has had it with the Patriarchs of his day – the scribes and Pharisees who have authority over the household of God, and who've squandered their authority on a laundry list of dos and don'ts. They've forgotten the most important thing: God's rules are intended to bring *life*. In this case, Jesus disputes their hard-and-fast rules about Sabbath-keeping. If gathering food is out of line, and healing is *verboten*, then they've robbed Sabbath of its life-giving purpose, and turned into a checklist.

Which leads me to ask, how do *we* use our authority – in our household or an office, on a board or in our community? Having authority is a tricky thing. It’s easy to lose sight of what really matters. But trust me – our priorities come through loud and clear. I shared this data with you on Mother’s Day that really struck a nerve; since it applies on Father’s Day too, I’ll share it again. In a Harvard study, 10,000 Jr. Hi kids who were asked this question: “Do your parents care more about your grades or whether you are kind?” Do you remember how many kids said “my parents care more about grades than whether I’m kind”? 30%? 50%? Guess again. **80%** of the Jr. High kids said their parents care less about kindness and much, much more about grades.ⁱⁱ

Today I want to ask us all: what *are* our deepest aspirations for ourselves, and for our children? What do we long for, for the next generation? What kind of values do we seek for the children of our church - the children of our community –the children of our nation? What kind of messages are we sending every day? Because, as we all know, there are plenty of toxic messages out there, and they are eating our culture alive.

I’ve thought a lot about that this week as I’ve pondered the atrocity of the Charleston, South Carolina racially-motivated shooting. As NBC reports, young Dylann Roof’s website “calls black people ‘stupid and violent,’ Jewish people an ‘enigma,’ Hispanic people a ‘huge problem,’ and East Asian people ‘by nature very racist.’”ⁱⁱⁱ And on his Facebook page, Roof is shown “posing with a Confederate flags plate on his car and wearing a jacket with stitched-on flag patches from apartheid-era South Africa.”^{iv} Apparently he missed the memo from the prophet Isaiah: God’s love isn’t just for insiders; it isn’t just for white people. “My house shall be a house of prayer for all people,” says the Lord, and ANYONE who keeps the Sabbath is God’s beloved child.

The way Roof's hatred played out is astonishing. He deliberately walked into a well-established AME church and was welcomed with open arms into their weekly Bible study. He stayed and read Scripture and prayed with them for an hour. And then, with calculated animus, he killed every person in the church, except one witness whom he spared to tell the story, and one small child who pretended to be dead. Can you even imagine the outrage if a young Arab Muslim man walked into our church and opened fire? Is no place safe? Is no place sacred?

And yet ... and yet, when this terrible, horrific, premeditated racist hate-crime unfolded, the response of the community he targeted – their response of those church members - sent an entirely different message. Instead of hate, they offered love. Instead of condemnation, they offered forgiveness:

“I just want everyone to know I forgive you,” said Nadine Collier, the daughter of victim Ethel Lance, 70. “You hurt me, you hurt a lot of people, but I forgive you.”

Felicia Sanders, who ... survived the attack along with her young granddaughter, told Mr. Roof that the Bible study group targeted in the shooting at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston had welcomed him that evening. Her son, Tywanza Sanders, 26, was killed in the attack on Wednesday night.

“You have killed some of the most beautiful people that I know. Every fiber in my body hurts, and I will never be the same,” she said. “May God have mercy on your soul.”

“Hate won't win,” said Alana Simmons, the granddaughter of the Rev. Daniel Simmons, 74.

Anthony Thompson, the grandson of Myra Thompson, 59, said that he and his family forgave Mr. Roof and urged him to repent and turn his life over to Jesus Christ. ^v

For me, their response evokes the reaction of the Amish when their children were shot in their Pennsylvania school nine years ago. It astonishes me. It humbles me. And it makes me wonder: how did they get there? How did they come to a place of compassion?

This is what I think: I think these members of the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church, I think these people came to this place because they practiced keeping Sabbath. Which brings me full-circle to our Scripture today. As the prophet Isaiah bears witness, God delights in those who keep Sabbath, for they are the ones who are prone to “maintain justice, and do what is right.” God delights in those who keep Sabbath, for they are the ones who are likely to “hold fast [God’s] covenant.”

Isn’t this what we witnessed this week? The Bible study where the Emanuel AME Church members gathered, week after week after week, it shaped them. The worship they attended, week after week after week, it moved them. Jesus Christ, whom they followed, week after week after week, he challenged them. They took to heart Jesus’ teaching to turn the other cheek (Matt. 5:39). They took to heart St. Paul’s instruction not to repay evil with evil, but to overcome evil with good (Rom. 12:21).

What we practice ... what we prioritize ... it makes us who we are. Call me naïve, but I am convinced that when we gather here, in Bible study and worship and faith formation – it reminds *us* what matters. When we keep Sabbath – it forces *us* to pause and wonder what messages we’re sending. When we keep Sabbath – it invites us to set down our worldly ambitions and remember we are all God’s beloved children. When we keep Sabbath – it

urges us to let go of frenetic schedules to notice the beauty of the earth, and the glory of the skies, the love of those around us or even the painful emptiness of those who are gone now. When we keep Sabbath – it begs us to take in God’s enormous love for us – for *all* of us – who are welcome here in God’s family, who belong here, in the household of God. Amen.

ⁱ *Every Father’s Daughter*, p. 15.

ⁱⁱ David Brooks in presentation Wednesday, May 6, 2015 at the Chicago Council of Global Affairs; see also *The Road to Character*.

ⁱⁱⁱ Elizabeth Chuck, “Racist Website Appears to Belong to Charleston Church Shooter Dylann Roof,”

<http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/charleston-church-shooting/racist-website-appears-belong-charleston-church-shooter-dylann-roof-n379021>

^{iv} <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/charleston-shooting-suspect-dylann-roof-wanted-to-start-a-civil-war-former-friend-says/>

^v <http://www.wsj.com/articles/dylann-roof-faces-nine-counts-of-murder-in-charleston-church-shooting-1434723786>